

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Julian Marvin Swain

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Swain, Julian
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Julian Marvin Swain,
Dates:	March 23, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:47:02).
Abstract:	Choreographer and dancer Julian Marvin Swain (1924 - 2011) formed the Co-Op Trio, which performed with Count Basie and Duke Ellington. Swain was also the founder of the Julian Swain Inner City Dance Theatre and Julian Swain and Friends, and was a dance panelist for the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. Swain was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 23, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_075
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dancer, choreographer, and entertainer Julian Marvin Swain was born on December 18, 1924 in Chicago, Illinois. Raised by his mother, Sarah Elizabeth Davis Swain, he attended Stephen A. Douglas Elementary School and Wendell Phillips High School. At Chicago's Southside Community Arts Center, Swain met artists like Margaret Goss Burroughs and Gordon Parks and took lessons with dancers Lester Goodman, Lucille Ellis, Wilbert Bradley, Sammy Dyer, Tommy Gomez and Jimmy Payne. Swain performed with Carmencita Romero in the Annual Artists Ball at the Savoy. In 1940, Swain traveled with Romero and danced in Toronto before learning about African dance in New York from Senegal's Assadata Dafora.

Returning to Chicago, Swain worked as one of choreographer Lon Fontaine's "Beige Beaus" at the Beige Room. Swain then became choreographer and lead dancer at Chicago's Club DeLisa, but gained his greatest notoriety as a member of the Co-Op Trio with Peter Green and Ann Henry. The Co-Ops performed with top acts like Count Basie and in venues like Larry Steele's Club Harlem in Atlantic City, New Jersey and Arthur Bragg's Idlewild Review in Michigan. In the 1960s, Swain continued to perform ballet and modern and ethnic dance and in 1971, he formed the Julian Swain Inner City Dance Theatre at Malcolm X College.

As a singer and actor Swain has performed in various musical reviews and revivals including Okoro Harold Johnson's *Don't Get Around Much Anymore*, Randall Johnson's *Le Stardust Revue*, *A Tribute to Duke Ellington*, Chuck Hoenes' *Best of the Hit Paradors* and *Sugar*. Featured in the *The Blues Brothers*, Swain also performed in Carlos Santana and Michelle Branch's "The Game of Love" video. A dance panelist for the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, Swain also participates in Dance Africa. A recipient of the Black Theatre Alliance Award, Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley honored Swain with the 2004 Chicago Senior Citizen Award.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Julian Marvin Swain was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 23, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Choreographer and dancer Julian Marvin Swain (1924 - 2011) formed the Co-Op Trio, which performed with Count Basie and Duke Ellington. Swain was also the founder of the Julian Swain Inner City Dance Theatre and Julian Swain and Friends, and was a dance panelist for the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

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Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Swain, Julian

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Griffin, Jeff (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Swain, Julian--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Dancer

Choreographer

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Julian Marvin Swain, March 23, 2005. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Julian Marvin Swain, Section A2005_075_001_001, TRT: 0:28:25 ?

Julian Marvin Swain was born on December 8, 1924 in Chicago, Illinois to Sarah Davis Swain. His mother told him that she was born in Los Angeles, California on July 4, 1889 and grew up in Springfield, Illinois. Swain knows

little about his maternal family, except that he is of mixed Native American, African American and white ancestry. He never met any relative other than his mother, including his father, Leonard Swain, who, he was told, attended Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee and worked as a Pullman porter. Swain's mother was employed as a domestic and later as a nutritionist at Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago. Swain grew up in the Gap section of Chicago's Bronzeville, where he lived in a single family home designed by Louis Sullivan but converted to tenement apartments by that time. At Stephen A. Douglas School, he encountered Maudelle B. Bousfield, the first black principal in Chicago, and gym teacher Katherine Flowers, one of the original members of the Katherine Dunham Company.

Video Oral History Interview with Julian Marvin Swain, Section A2005_075_001_002, TRT: 0:29:37 ?

Julian Marvin Swain began his formal dance training at the South Side Community Art Center in Chicago, Illinois, where he worked with Lester Goodman, Jimmy Payne, Sr., Wilbur Bradley, and Thomas W. Gomez. He also met Ethel Waters and HistoryMakers Margaret Burroughs and Gordon Parks. With Peter Green, he formed The Co-Op Trio. Swain was a talented visual artist and obtained a scholarship to study at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. Swain's interest in dance was shared with childhood friend Melvin King, but King's talent was discouraged by his parents and teachers. While attending Wendell Phillips High School in Chicago, Swain auditioned for Sammy Dyer who told him to return when older. After a year, he became a performer under Dyer at Club DeLisa in Chicago. Carmencita Romero, a former member of HistoryMaker Katherine Dunham's troupe, was Swain's first influential dance mentor; his first performance outside of Chicago was at a carnival in Toronto, Canada performing with her company in a sideshow.

Video Oral History Interview with Julian Marvin Swain, Section A2005_075_001_003, TRT: 0:29:07 ?

Julian Marvin Swain, along with Carmencita Romero's other dancers, left a carnival side show where they had performed in Toronto, Canada for New York, New York in 1940. Despite his wish to return home to Chicago, Illinois, Swain spent six months in New York City at age sixteen with no means to leave. The company lived in a single hotel room on 135th Street and had to sleep in shifts. Swain performed with jazz drummer Cozy Cole. He took lessons in African dance from Asadata Dafora and was also influenced by Jimmy Payne, Sr.'s African and Latin style dances. After working various factory jobs, Swain finally was able to obtain a bus ticket home. Swain worked with Jackie Taylor in the early days of her career. He brought his own dance company to Lagos, Nigeria to perform at FESTAC in 1977. Swain compares the obstacles faced by African American performers of his generation and of today. He also gives advice to young African Americans interested in pursuing careers in the arts.

Video Oral History Interview with Julian Marvin Swain, Section A2005_075_001_004, TRT: 0:28:51 ?

Julian Marvin Swain was hired by Lon Fontaine to dance at the Beige Room of the Pershing Hotel in Chicago, Illinois in the mid-1940s. Swain became the leader and choreographer of the group known as the Beige Beaus. During a performance at the Regal Theater, Swain and fellow Beau Peter Green were noticed by Duke Ellington, who invited them on tour. Swain, Green, and Ann Henry formed the Co-Op Trio and performed with Josephine Baker. The group disbanded, but Swain and Green performed together as a duet. Upon splitting up with Green, Swain began to focus on choreography. He met HistoryMaker

Najwa I in 1952 while touring Australia and New Zealand with Larry Steele's 'Smart Affairs.' While dancing at the Roberts Show Club in Chicago, Swain was invited to bring a group of dancers to perform in Arthur Bragg's 'Idlewild Revue.' Swain talks about colorism in the African American community, particularly as he saw it manifested in Steele's casting as opposed to Bragg's.

Video Oral History Interview with Julian Marvin Swain, Section A2005_075_001_005, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Julian Marvin Swain performed with Sarah Vaughan, Carman McRae and Dinah Washington. He appeared with Nat King Cole at the Regal Theater in Chicago, Illinois. Once Stone-Camryn School of Ballet in Chicago began accepting African American dancers, Swain started studying ballet there; he remained associated with the school for twenty years and mentored its African American students, including Thea Barnes and Cheryl D. Barnes Following his mother's death in 1970, Swain enrolled at Malcom X College in Chicago. With the help of HistoryMaker Najwa I, Swain formed the Julian Swain Inner City Dance Theatre on campus to create a venue for African American men to develop as dancers. HistoryMaker Phil Cohran helped the company with its early showcases. In 1977, the company performed at FESTAC in Lagos, Nigeria. Swain's company later became the NAJWA Dance Corps. Swain has taught at Barat College in Lake Forest, Illinois, as well as Chicago's Columbia College, Roosevelt University, Malcom X College and Truman College.

Video Oral History Interview with Julian Marvin Swain, Section A2005_075_001_006, TRT: 0:21:12 ?

Julian Marvin Swain's dance company, the Julian Swain Inner City Dance Theatre, eventually became the NAJWA Dance Corps. For a time, Swain held the dance school in the penthouse of the Monadnock Building in Chicago, Illinois. After he ended his teaching career, he returned to singing, appearing in 'RSVP Broadway' at the Theatre Building Chicago. This led to his collaboration with HistoryMaker Okoro Harold Johnson on musical theater productions for eta Creative Arts Foundation in Chicago. Swain reflects upon his hopes for the African American community, his mother's perspective on his career, his life and legacy, and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes his interview by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Julian Marvin Swain, Section A2005_075_Swain_Julian_06_MED_001, TRT: 0:57:03